Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages | Commissariat aux langues officielles

Ottawa, September 25, 2001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

30th anniversary of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages: a catalyst for change in Canadian society

The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2000-2001. In honour of the occasion, the Commissioner, Dr. Dyane Adam, issued a separate publication accompanying her annual report. Entitled *Our Official Languages: As a Century Ends and a Millennium Begins*, the publication gives an overview of official languages in Canada and recalls the contribution made over the years by the Office of the Commissioner to language progress in our country.

Five commissioners have overseen the implementation of the official languages program in Canada. Keith Spicer was the trailblazer who began the journey in 1970, at a time when many federal services were available in English only. A good communicator, he accepted the challenge of changing attitudes by explaining the objectives of Canada's linguistic duality, encouraging cultures to better appreciate each other and encouraging the use of both English and French in the federal public service. Over the years, the commissioners continued the work of their predecessors, each one dealing with the linguistic and constitutional crises of the day. Commissioners Maxwell Yalden, D'Iberville Fortier and Victor C. Goldbloom worked steadily to promote the language rights of Canadians and to foster closer ties between the two communities. During their mandates, the language issue expanded to include the country's two linguistic minorities. The commissioners endeavoured to achieve recognition for the right to vitality and development of Anglophone and Francophone minority communities, especially with regards to access to education and services in their language.

"The time when bilingualism was limited to symbols and translation is now a thing of the past. Federal services are now largely available in both official languages, and the vitality of linguistic minorities reflects the progress made, even though living in a minority situation still requires daily efforts," stated Dr. Adam. Moreover, the last three decades have seen the emergence of a generation of Canadians who understand that becoming bilingual in a country with two official languages has personal advantages and opens a window on another culture.

Thirty years after the creation of the Office of the Commissioner, Dr. Adam recognizes that this work is ongoing and that there are still obstacles and setbacks in the pursuit of the ideal. Much remains to be done to ensure full compliance with the letter and spirit of the *Official Languages Act* in federal institutions and in Canadian society as a whole. "This ideal of linguistic duality aptly expresses the spirit of Canada, a country in which people of diverse cultures and languages strive to live in harmony. We can all be proud of the progress made, but we must persevere, because building a society in which everyone feels completely at home is a tremendous challenge," Dr. Adam concluded.

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Date modified: 2007-08-28